



McClain tensed himself, ready for action, as Eddie Lowry lifted the pistol

MONEY MUSIC

By C. S. MONTANYE

Homicide Detective Dave McClain takes the melody trail of a killer when murder and harmony cause a discord of crime!

THE place was the Shore House, a hangout for waterfront characters, in lower Manhattan, near West Street. That fact alone made Dave McClain, the big Homicide dick, hold his nose when the prowler car that brought him over from Center Street slid into the curb. It stopped between two banks of garbage cans.

Sergeant Dillon, at the wheel, grinned.

"It's all yours, Mac. Help yourself."

"What a life!" McClain said and

uncoiled his long body, pushed his number twelves out to the greasy sidewalk and automatically dipped in under his overcoat for a cigar.

"Stay riveted, Sarge. I may need you—to spray a little perfume."

Inside, the woman who had called Mullin, chief of the Bureau, was pacing the drugget on the lobby floor like a caged lioness. She looked something like one, Mac decided, with her orange-bleached hair and snapping eyes. Her name was

Mrs. Crabble and, when her late husband had fallen off a tugboat after a prolonged bottle-and-glass tournament, she had inherited the hostelry, lock, stock and vermin.

"Where's the body?" Mac sounded bored.

Also present were a couple of shaky, pasty-faced citizens who would never have won any beauty contests. Ex-dock workers and stevedores, retired on small pensions and devoting idle days and nights to alcoholic pursuits. They scratched themselves and watched McClain follow their landlady to the floor above.

Patrolman Ferris, who had the beat and had been summoned by Mrs. Crabble, lounged at the door of a room whose dirty white numerals spelled out 129.

He nodded to Mac while the woman with the orange-tinted hair produced a key and began to unlock the door.

"I knocked at half past nine," she said over her shoulder. "I didn't want to bother him because he came in late last night. He was up to see his uncle—at Sing Sing. The poor man died not long after Mr. Haley left."

"Tough," McClain commented. "Two in a row."

"When he didn't answer," Mrs. Crabble continued, clicking the lock back, "I opened the door with the pass-key. I took one look and ran out and got this cop." She indicated Ferris with a nod of her leonine head. "He told me who to call and what to say."

"Let's take a peek," Mac suggested.

The stale smell of the place seemed accented when the door opened and he walked into a narrow bedroom. Light filtered through an open window whose shade was up all the way. Light enough for Mac to see the whirlwind of disorder the room was in and the body of Ned Haley.

Haley reposed on his back. Which was just as well. When Mac turned him over he saw that one side of the young man's skull had been ruthlessly pushed in. Probably under the severe impact of a hammer or some other hard object. Death had struck with the speed of lightning.

McCLAIN studied the slender figure silently. Haley was about twenty-three or four, average in build and weight. Mac, who knew everybody in upper, and lower, crime circles, couldn't thumb him. He shook his head and stared around.

Drawers in a painted bureau sagged open. The closet had been ransacked. The bed had been pulled apart, its mattress slit in several places, the felt stuffing thrown around. The mangy carpet, too, had been dragged up and, McClain saw, Haley's pockets investigated and their contents strewn about.

"Give Captain Mullin a buzz," he told the patrolman at the door. "Tell him to send 'Doc' Carney up with the bulb-and-powder boys."

Ferris nodded and clumped down the stairs. Mrs. Crabble, resting a man-sized shoulder against the wall, looked very unhappy.

"I can sew the mattress up, but I'll never get the bloodstains out of the carpet. Why didn't he go and get killed out in the street?"

"Probably the thoughtless type." Mac, using a handkerchief, gathered up Haley's belongings.

A New York Central timetable, half a package of cigarettes, some keys, a book of matches and a worn wallet. Mac looked into that. It was as empty as an erring husband's promise. What it had contained, a 1943 driving license, a calendar and a pawn ticket on a watch in the amount of five dollars, had been carelessly discarded.

Mac put them together and rubbed his chin.

"What did this party grind at?"

"Nothing much." Mrs. Crabble sniffed. "He was in and out of jobs all the time. I think the last one he had was in a garage."

"You said he went to see his uncle—at Sing Sing?"

"He got a call from the prison hospital. His uncle had a heart attack and wanted to see him. He left here around four o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"What was Unk's name?" Mac frowned.

"You ought to know." Mrs. Crabble smiled pensively. "You boys sent him up there. Harry Ruff. 'Fat Boy' Ruff. Remember?"

McClain twisted all the way around and stared at the woman. Fat Boy Ruff! He remembered, not well, but too well. Ruff had been the central figure in a loft stick-up the previous winter. Ruff, with Buddy Scanlon and a couple of other armed hoodlums, had put the grab on a women's clothing manufacturer in the crowded garment district.

When the boss of the establishment was able to knock a telephone over, and the police came, he was plus a fractured jaw and his safe minus twenty-eight thousand dollars in payroll cash.

Ruff and Scanlon had been picked up a week later, identified, tried and sent away for a ten to twenty stretch. But the manufacturer had failed to recover a dime of his lifted dough. Mac remembered Ruff had said something about being hi-jacked out of the coin by some Hoboken burghers who had pressed blunderbusses against Scanlon and himself before doing the moth act.

Buddy, his pal, had told the same story. It might or might not have been true. Either way, not a dollar bill of the twenty-eight grand had ever been located. Mac let

the thought trickle through his mind as he looked at the lady with the citrus fruit hair.

"Did you see Haley when he got in?" He asked.

"No, I didn't."

"Then how did you know about Ruff seizing a harp?"

"I heard that on the radio. You ought to listen to the news flashes once in awhile. Saves you reading the papers."

McClain let that go and unbuttoned Ned Haley's vest. He slipped his long fingers in under it and felt around. Nothing but an undershirt, soggy in places with the ooze that had leaked down on it. He looked at the dead man's suspenders. Haley didn't take any chances on losing his trousers. In addition to the braces he wore a belt. Something about it caught Mac's interest.

Unnotching it, he slid the belt through its loops and ran a thumb along its leather length.

"How about your night clerk?"

"My—which?" Mrs. Crabble laughed. "Night clerk? Brother, I ain't had one of them things since before Pearl Harbor. At eight o'clock I close the joint up and it stays closed until seven the next A.M."

"Then nobody knows who stopped around to see Haley after he got in last night?"

"I don't. Maybe old man Landt does. He had two bits on him last night so I let him doze, with his feet on the desk."

"Go and get him." McClain smiled. "I'm always interested in meeting boys who sleep with their feet on desks."

"I'll look, but I don't make no guarantee." Mrs. Crabble went out.

HE SHUT the door after her and dropped down on a chair. The belt buckle had a fold of leather behind it. Mac slid it back and found an opening. That made it a money belt. Only there wasn't

any money in it. There was a folded sheet of note paper with some music inked across it and the words, 'My Mother's Lullaby'.

Thoughtfully, Mac put the music in his pocket and the belt back on Haley. He had hardly finished when Mrs. Crabble returned.

"Old man Landt's gone," she announced. "You'll probably find him at the tavern around the corner."

McClain nodded and a moment later heard the familiar wail of a police car's siren out in the street.

Some forty minutes later, when Captain Fred Mullin, head of the Homicide Bureau was finished in Room 129, McClain flatfooted around to the tavern Mrs. Crabble had mentioned. But, he learned, the man he looked for hadn't been there that morning.

Mac went back to the Shore House for a word with its proprietress. The morgue cart had come and the remains of Ned Haley had been removed. Patrolman Ferris had gone back to his beat and a couple of mournful looking lobby addicts were staked out near the desk, gazing blankly at the walls surrounding them. Mac made a grimace, bit the end from his second stogie and buttoned his coat.

"When Landt drops in again, hold him here and call headquarters," he directed.

His next stop was that discordant district, off Longacre Square, known as Tin Pan Alley. Mac had a lot of friends in the theater business. One of them, a Jerry Wynne, was a staff composer and song-plugger for the Al Shine House of Hits. Mac walked into the place, his ears wincing at the piano bedlam that came when various booth doors opened, and caught a glimpse of Wynne going over a number for a little night club singer.

Wynne gave him the office and Mac went into the glass-lined canary cage.

"Hello, kid. I'll just sit around until you're not so busy." He grunted.

"Meet Miss Florenzi," Wynne nodded toward the songstress. "Flo, this is Dave McClain of Homicide. You'd better be good when he's around."

"Oh, a secret service man?" The girl widened ocean-blue eyes. "I've always wanted to meet a secret service man!"

Mac shook hands with her and sat down on a leather bench. Wynne, young, dapper and 4F, finished trying out a new number and the girl tapped out on high heels.

"Look, Jerry." The big dick reached in his pocket. "I've got a song here I'd like you to play for me."

"Don't tell me you're turning songwriter." Wynne took the folded sheet of paper. "'My Mother's Lullaby.' It used to go something like this—'If you don't wash your ears I'll tell your old man when he comes home,' or, 'Get out of that refrigerator and stay out. Who do you think you are—the ice man?'"

"Score. How does the tune go?"

"It don't."

"What do you mean?" McClain frowned.

"This isn't a song," Jerry Wynne propped the sheet of paper on the piano's rack. "Just a lot of notes jotted down, without any meaning. Listen, if you don't believe me."

With one finger he pounded out some unrelated sounds. He handed the 'music' back to Mac.

"Not a song, huh?" McClain put the paper back in his pocket. "Funny. Thanks anyway."

He was back at headquarters, up to his ears in the files, when Mullin sent for him.

"That dame at the Shore House," Mullin said. "She's been phoning down. Says she's got a guy you want to see. You'd better go up."

"Check."

"What were you doing down in the file room?"

"Getting a memory fresh-up. Reading all about the Fat Boy Ruff grab last winter. Which reminds me. I'd like to talk to the head of the hospital at Sing Sing. He don't know me. So, maybe, you'd better get him," Mac said.

Mullin's cold eyes roamed over him.

"What's the angle?"

"Who burned out this Ned Haley party—naturally." McClain shrugged. "I've got ideas. Want to introduce me over the wire, chief?"

A few minutes later McClain was talking with Doctor Hammond at the penitentiary hospital. He fed the questions, and Hammond answered them.

"I understand Ruff had a visitor yesterday afternoon."

"Yes, he did—his nephew." The sawbones said.

"Who was with them at the time?" Mac asked.

"I was."

"Can you tell me what happened?"

"It was brief. Ruff's nephew sat at his bedside. He was only there ten minutes. The conversation was mostly about a headstone. Ruff knew he was finished. Oh, yes, I almost forgot. And a song Ruff said he wrote."

McClain's eyes began to glisten.

"What about that song, Doc?"

"Just before he left Ruff took some music from under his pillow. He said he'd been composing the song for sometime. He wanted his nephew to have it. He told him there might be money in it."

MAC hung up after a few more words. Mullin looked at him interrogatively.

"Learn anything?"

"Plenty," Mac used his soft voice.

"Plenty. Right now I'll spread a foot and see the guy Mrs. Crabble has on the hook for me. If he can handle an identification, I think this thing is wrapped up like a broken arm!"

Old man Landt, a rheumy-eyed, shabby lobby-bird, fortunately had more intelligence than those who sat around the Shore House staring at nothing in particular. Landt had been a house painter in his day. His mind was in good working order.

He listened to what Mac threw at him.

"Sure, I seen a punk go upstairs. He came down with Ned. They went out and had a drink."

"Did Haley come back alone?"

Landt shook his head.

"The two of them came back. The bloke stayed upstairs about ten or fifteen minutes. Then he went out, alone—in a hurry."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?" McClain asked the question slowly.

Landt nodded a second time.

"Sure."

"Then," Mac said, "let's hop down and give you a view of some double features, full faces and profiles. I'll buy your lunch so you won't be wasting your time."

In not more than ten minutes after Landt started looking at the photographic exhibition in the Rogues Gallery, he laid his finger on the daguerreotype of a thin-faced, small-eyed man whose principal claim to fame seemed to be a pair of oversized ears.

"That's him! That's the bloke!"

McClain grinned.

"Eddie Lowry. Well, quite a coincidence. Much obliged, old timer. Here's a couple of bucks; buy yourself a rabbit pie."

Back in Captain Fred Mullin's office, Mac draped himself in a dusty chair and fished around until he found a cellophane-wrapped cigar.

"I need a good stoolie," McClain told his chief. "Someone like 'Babe' Thomas, for instance. He's in circulation, I understand. Where can I find him, skipper?"

"Thomas? Probably over at the fish market. He's hustling flounders for the dock company." Mullin coughed. "By the way, Wheeler found the murder weapon—out in the airshaft Haley's room opened on. It's down in the exhibit department, if you want to look at a short handled stone mason's hammer with a lot of coagulated blood on it."

"I'd rather look at the Babe." McClain began to get up. "It won't take long to find out if Eddie Lowry chalked this kill up. All I've got to do is fix a nice trap for him to walk into and—"

He put on his hat. Mullin curled a lip.

"Yeah? And what's your bait?"

"Music. If they use it to charm snakes, it ought to be good enough to make rats sing!"

The big dick knocked off about six o'clock that evening. He went uptown to the Sixties where he had a furnished room in an apartment his brother-in-law paid the rent on. Both his sister and her husband were over in Brooklyn, visiting friends. McClain was aware of this and purposely used the room for his interview with Babe Thomas, the stool-pigeon.

Mac took off his shoes and coat. He pulled a chair around to the lamp in his room and settled back comfortably to wait. He got a paper, but his mind kept wandering away from the baseball items.

Maybe he was hot, maybe he was cold. Maybe he had the thing figured to the last detail. Or possibly he was a thousand miles away from the solution of the Haley

bump. After a few minutes he took out the pen and ink copy of *'My Mother's Lullaby'* and studied it meditatively. He made a mental eight-to-five bet with himself that he was right. Now he had to wait for the answer to come to him!

An hour passed and Mac yawned. He was reaching for his watch on the table when he heard the front door in the apartment close. Normally, the sound of it would have been so low as to be almost unheard.. But to Mac, at that moment, it was like a firecracker exploding in a tin washboiler. He sat motionless—waiting.

THEN, from a point behind him, a sudden voice ripped out an order:

"Don't move, cop! Unless you want your scalp torn off with a slug!"

Mac's eyes trailed left. A thin-faced man with large ears half poked under the sweat band of a brown felt hat, stood in the bedroom doorway. He had piercing eyes that glinted like the blue-steel .38 caliber gun he trained on the big dick.

"Hello, Lowry," Mac said. "You around again? Seems like somebody told me the parole board made a mistake and turned you loose. Come on in and sit down—"

"Reach!"

Mac raised his hands, both of them.

"Something I can do for you?"

"Yeah. Plenty." Thin lips crawled back in a sneer. "You used to know all the answers. Maybe you've got one for this."

"Not one—a couple." McClain gave a reasonable facsimile of boredom by yawning in Lowry's face. "Last night you did some fancy skull work on Fat Boy Ruff's nephew. You heard that Haley had been up at the antiseptic division of the stone-and-bars and you had a pretty good idea what Ruff wanted to see him about. After you wrote him off you cleaned his room, but you didn't get what you want.

You forgot to look in the money belt he was wearing.”

“Shut up!” A wave of color went across Lowry’s thin, tight face. “You’ve got what I want! Hand it over!”

Mac wriggled his toes in his socks. He kept one eye on the nose of the gun in the killer’s hand. He yawned, but made no move to lower his lifted arms.

“Hand over—what?” He asked through the yawn.

A muscle in Lowry’s face twitched.

“The thing Fat Boy gave Ned up in the hospital!”

“Oh, that.” McClain laughed. “Sure, help yourself. It’s in my coat pocket. But it is not going to do you any good. You’re not able to read notes. Perhaps I’d better explain it to you.”

The glinting eyes darted to the detective. Lowry moistened his thin lips. Mac saw speculation in his gaze, questions.

“What—” The crook sputtered.

“It’s like this.” Mac crossed one leg over the other. “You ran with Ruff’s crew. You had a front row seat at the loft swipe that cold winter day. The Fat Boy, Buddy Scanlon, you and a couple of others. Ruff and Scanlon were pegged for a long bend. You got it lighter as a first offender. Right?”

Lowry said nothing.

“One thing had you troubled,” McClain continued. “The twenty-eight G’s and your cut of it. You tried to get through to Ruff up at the pen, when your parole swung around. But Ruff had other ideas about that cached money. So you put your wits to work and began to figure that young Haley was the heir to the throne.

“You were pretty sure that, sooner or later, when Ruff knew he was heaven-bound with his bad ticker, he’d communicate with Ned. And yesterday happened to be the day. Right?”

“Where’s the map?” Lowry snarled.

“I told you—in my coat pocket.” McClain smiled faintly. “But it won’t do you much good. I followed directions and beat you to it, Eddie. I’ll give you a better map on where the cash is now. Down at headquarters. If you want it, you’ll have to ask Captain Mullin for it!”

“You’re lying!”

“Okay,” McClain shrugged. “There’s the chart, folded up in the form of a lullaby, in my pocket. Check on it and you’ll find I’m right.”

The nose of the gun went down three inches. This was the moment Mac was banking on. Half undecided, the lids dropped over Lowry’s staring eyes. Mac knew what he was thinking. Natural caution rang a bell of suspicion in the killer’s brain. But the temptation to see if he were being ribbed, or if it were a straight lead—was too much to withstand.

Lowry reached. His left hand pulled out the sheet of paper with the music on it. McClain tensed himself. In his mind, split-n seconds drew him closer to the minute of action.

That came when Eddie Lowry’s gaze dropped to the paper as his talon-like fingers opened it.

Mac was out of his chair like a quarter horse from an electric stall-gate. For a big guy he moved with amazing speed and agility. He sidestepped, cracking Lowry’s pistol arm floorward. The .38 went off, but the slug ripped his sister Ann’s Axminster instead of his scalp. Mac had him before he could trigger again.

The big dick slammed a bunch of knuckles into the thin, skin-taut face. The power behind it almost knocked Lowry’s head off. Mac felt bone, cartilage and muscle give. But Lowry, punch dizzy, still had fight in him.

He drove a knee into the pit of Mac’s stomach, panting a curse while he tried to

use his teeth on the detective's neck. In a frenzy, the killer called on every trick in his book. Mac had a bad minute or two before he got mad and slammed over a left to the button.

That shot was an earthquake in fist form and did it.

Lowry went over backwards, and cracked his knob on the footrail of the bed, bounced on the floor and then lay motionless.

Mac blew on his knuckles and went in the adjoining room to telephone.

"So you got the hide-out money. So you got Lowry and he spilled," Mullin said to McClain, an hour or so later. "You pulled both out of a hat—"

"Out of a belt," McClain corrected. He took *'My Mother's Lullaby'* and laid it on the desk. "There's the payoff. Money music."

"Code?" The head of Homicide looked up. "How does it go? We don't have a piano, but maybe you can hum it."

DETECTIVE McCLAIN grinned, a wide, satisfied grin. He pointed to the notes that made up the bars of music.

"Sure. Anything to oblige you, Captain. Music is written on five lines and

in four spaces. I learned that in school. The spaces are lettered f-a-c-e. The lines are e-g-b-d-f. What the Fat Boy did was to use a note for a letter and draw a perpendicular line to close each word. That's why it didn't make a tune when Wynne played it for me. But it made a sweet song when I turned the notes into letters."

Mullin picked up a pencil and went to work.

In a few minutes he had the answer.

"ED," he read. "BED. CAGE." He shook his head. "What does that mean?"

Dave McClain reached for a cigar he had bought on his way in. He lighted it, blew the match out with a puff of smoke and rolled the tobacco cylinder appreciatively between his lips.

"Ed," he explained, "is Edwina, the late Ruff's old aunt. Bed, I figured, meant bedroom. Cage—I didn't get until I stopped around. In the old dame's bedroom is an empty parrot's cage, with a deep base. And in the base was the lettuce, all in neat piles. Simple. When you check records and find out about relatives—and know the way the music goes!"